

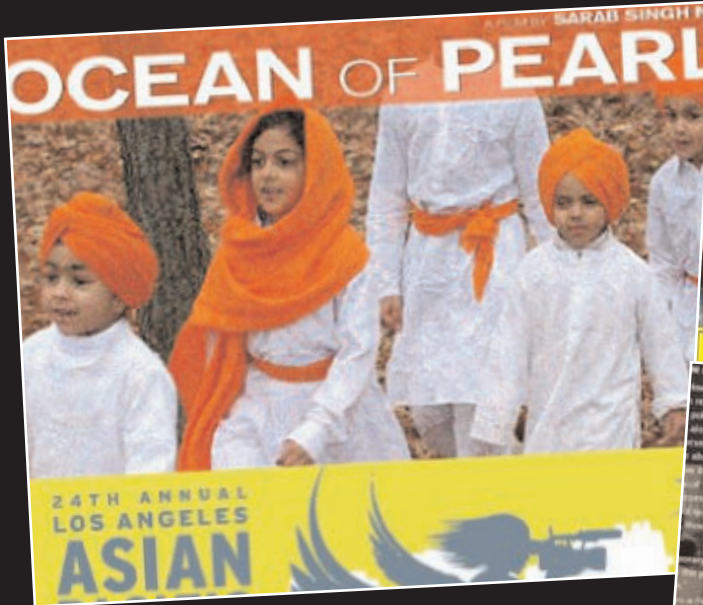
Sikh Film Festival takes off to showcase Heritage

The Sikh Film Festival started as part of the Heritage week last Saturday at the Asia Society on Park Avenue, taking off with a short documentary, "Warrior Saints," by Kevin Lee, that profiles the Sikh community in New York City. It centers on Richmond Hill, Queens.

The 9/11 attack spurred the community to organize after an elderly Sikh and two teenagers were violently attacked in Richmond Hill in "reprisal" attacks by fellow Americans. The documentary interviews a number of younger professional Sikh New Yorkers who formed the Sikh Coalition from the volunteer group, who explain how they came to realize the value of protest in drawing media and political attention to their problems. Most recently, for example, they organized protests around attacks on Sikh schoolchildren.

The efforts resulted in a bill that would get the city to form a contingency plan to mitigate backlash violence against Sikhs, Arabs, Muslims and South Asians in the aftermath of events and another bill that would ban discrimination on the basis of religious garb in New York City uniformed agencies. They also have made a push to educate law enforcement about Sikhism. A 2005 episode saw the police mistakenly handcuff a group of Sikh British tourists in Midtown.

Among other movies at the festival is the feature film called "Ocean of Pearls," directed by Dr. Sarab Singh Neelam, about the story of a young Sikh doctor struggling with the inequities of the American health system and ultimately his own identity. There are four documentaries: "A Dream in Doubt," directed by Tami Yeager,



Some comments on the festival

● "It was truly a remarkable event. In fact in my 17 years of living here - I have never attended such a grand and well organized event put up by any community. So heartiest congratulations. You also have a powerful outreach - as I got more calls from all over the world over this award than even the National Award."
- Shonali Bose (Amu), recipient of Sikh Art & Film Foundation's Courage Award 2007

● "As a non-Sikh, I offer a fresh perspective that does not take their cultural uniqueness for granted. More importantly, upon witnessing and reflecting on the beliefs and personal struggles of Sikh Americans, I have grown immensely through my journey with them, not just as a filmmaker but as a human being."
- Kevin Lee (Dastaar)

gling with the inequities of the American health system and ultimately his own identity. There are four documentaries: "A Dream in Doubt," directed by Tami Yeager,

which profiles the violent aftermath of 9/11 in which Sikhs were singled out because of their turbans and beards; "The Sky Below," by Sarah Singh, which takes a con-

temporary look at the 1947 partition of the Indian Sub-Continent; "Sikhs in America," which won an Emmy, shows how Sikhs maintain their traditions while also partici-

pating in the American dream; and "Pahelwani," by Navdeep Singh Kandola, which traces the history and traditions of the dying art of Punjabi wrestling.

Sikh Heritage Awards

A grateful Sikh community acknowledged the work of non-Sikhs and Sikhs who have worked for the preservation of Sikh heritage and culture worldwide during the Heritage week celebrations in New York. The Sikh Arts and Film Foundation also honoured Sikhs who have excelled in their vocations and have enriched the community in diverse spheres.

Stuart Rabinowitz, President of Hofstra University, Ajay Singh Banga, Chief Executive Officer - Citi Asia Pacific, Susan Stronge, Senior Curator - Asian Department of The Victoria & Albert Museum, Jagdeep Singh, President of Infinera Corporation was honored for leadership as a leading entrepreneur in Silicon Valley, director Shonali Bose and producer Bedebrata Pain for 1984 movie, Amu, New York State Comptroller Thomass DiNapoli for post 9/11 awareness about Sikhs and for co-sponsoring legislation supporting religious freedom. Who's who of the Sikh and Punjabi world attended the gala evening including Bollywood star Kabir Bedi, Dr Ruby Dhalla, Member of Parliament, Canada, Consul General of India, Neelam Deo, Lawrence Mulvey, Nassau County Police Commissioner and Dr. Chirinjeev Kathuria, Chairman of Planetspace. All the patrons of the Sikh Art and Film Foundation attended the gala including: Ajay Banga, Chairman, Global Consumer Group - CITI, Ishar S. Bindra, Chairman Jeetish Group of Companies, Sant S. Chatwal, Chairman Hampshire Hotels & Resorts, LLC., Dr. Narinder S. Kapany, Chairman of Sikh Foundation, Palo Alto California Gurpreet Singh (Judgee), Chairman Grace Drive Management Corporation. The Board of Directors for the Spinning Wheel Festival was also present to support the event including Dr. Brinder Singh Ahluwalia, Bicky Singh (chair of Los Angeles Chapter) and T. Sher Singh.